

SMALL GAME COOKING CARE

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Small Game — Cooking Care

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The Hunt

Hunting small game animals in Texas is a popular recreational activity. Careful handling and preparation help you use game and avoid unnecessary waste of wild game resources if you do hunt.

Squirrels are small game in Texas and are hunted during prescribed seasons. Rabbits, not considered legally as game animals, may be taken at any time. They are of good eating quality, especially cottontails and swamp rabbits. Opossums and raccoons are fur-bearing animals that can be taken for their furs only during prescribed seasons. They can be taken throughout the year for food purposes. Armadillos and rattlesnakes are also popular with many hunters in Texas.

Game animals, including rabbits, are usually healthy. However, observe the reaction of the rabbit when it is flushed from cover. If it behaves sluggishly or erratically, avoid shooting as this indicates it may be diseased. Use meat from healthy animals.

Proper Field Care

Field care for small game is simple and most animals can be dressed in a similar manner.

Proper field care prevents spoilage and off flavors which may develop from growth of microorganisms and penetration of gastric fluids into the muscle. Many hunters carry a sharp skinning knife or jackknife and clean cloths or paper towels for use in field dressing the animal. An insulated cooler with ice or ice packs is advisable on a warm day if you have to travel a considerable distance in a car.

Use these steps in field dressing rabbit or squirrels:

1. Bleed the animal immediately.
2. Remove the entrails and wipe the body cavity with a clean cloth, paper towels or dry grass. To remove the entrails of a small animal, make a cut from the anus to the ribs, taking care to avoid cutting the intestines.

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3. Remove body heat by allowing air to circulate around it. Never stack the animals or put them in the pockets of hunting jacket.

Dressing of Small Game

When you get home, skin and finish dressing the game, removing any shot-damaged parts. A short soaking in a strong salt solution helps remove excessive bloodiness around shot, but is recommended only for this purpose.

Skinning should be done as soon as possible. Slit along the center back with a sharp knife. Cut across 2 or 3 inches near the middle of the back of a squirrel or rabbit. Insert your fingers beneath the skin on each side of the cut and pull in opposite directions. If needed, wipe the carcass with a damp cloth to remove hair or debris. Remove the head, feet and tail.

Pull skin off and sever at the neck and feet. Wipe off loose hairs. Store dressed small game in the refrigerator (38° to 40° F.) until ready to cook, or freeze the meat right away.

Opossums and raccoons are more difficult to skin than rabbits or squirrels. Allow the carcass to hang in a cool place for 24 to 48 hours. When it is time to skin the animal, cut the skin from where you stopped when removing the entrails up to the chin. From the cut extending from the chin to the tail, cut the skin up each leg to the foot. Cut the skin around the base of each foot and around the neck. Pull the skin loose from each leg, the neck and finally the back. Wipe clean with a damp cloth after removing the feet, head and tail. Remove the excess fat from the carcass.

Storage

Store dressed squirrel in the refrigerator (38° to 40° F.) until ready to cook, or freeze the meat right away.

Package completely dressed animals carefully in moisture-vapor-proof material — heavy duty foil, plastic freezer bags or waxed freezer paper. Freeze immediately and store no longer than 4 to 6 months. Always thaw by placing the package in the refrigerator for 12 to 18 hours or place under cold running water.

How Small Game Fits into Basic Four Food Groups

Small game provides variety to meals of families of Texas sportsmen and contributes needed high quality nutrients. Utilization of this wild game means conservation of a valuable resource and can be a food budget stretcher the year round.

Meat Group

Small game fits into the meat group of the basic four food groups. Like domestic meat, it is rich in protein, minerals and vitamins. The fat content of various small game varies and is discussed in more detail in the section on cooking each type of small game. Small game can furnish the two servings of meat needed daily. Serving size is 2 to 3 ounces of lean meat.

Protein, which is furnished by small game, is needed for growth and repair of body tissues, muscles, blood, skin and hair. Meat group foods also provide: phosphorus for strong bones; iron for helping cells carry oxygen; riboflavin and thiamine as part of enzymes to help release energy from food; niacin for healthy nerves; and fats for energy.

Part of the servings of meat group foods may come from other foods included in this group such as poultry, eggs, fish or shellfish, or meat alternates — dry beans, dry peas, nuts, peanuts or peanut butter.

Vegetable-Fruit Group

Choose four or more servings from the fruit and vegetable group. Include one serving rich in vitamin C or two servings of a fair source. Also include one serving at least every other day of a good source of vitamin A. If the food chosen for vitamin C is also a good source of vitamin A, the additional serving of vitamin A food may be omitted.

The remaining one to three or more servings may be of any vegetable or fruit, including those that are valuable for vitamins C and A.

Count ½ cup of vegetable or fruit as one serving, or a portion ordinarily served such as one medium apple, banana, orange or potato, half a medium grapefruit or cantaloupe or the juice of one lemon.

Some good sources of vitamin C are oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, broccoli and green pepper. Fair sources of vitamin C include lemon, raw cabbage, greens, tomatoes and potatoes in the jacket.

Good sources of vitamin A include dark green and deep yellow vegetables such as broccoli, carrots, greens, pumpkin and winter squash.

Milk Group

Include milk, cheese or ice cream in the daily meals. Milk is the leading source of calcium needed for bones and teeth. It also provides high quality protein, riboflavin, vitamin A and many other nutrients.

Recommended amounts of whole fluid milk are: children under 9 years of age — two to three cups (8-ounce cups); children 9 to 12 — three or more cups; teenagers — four or more cups; adults — two or more cups; pregnant women — three or more cups.

Part or all of the milk may be skim milk, buttermilk, evaporated milk or dry milk.

Cheese and ice cream may replace part of the milk. The amount is based on calcium equivalents in milk: 1-inch cube of cheddar type cheese = $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk; $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cottage cheese = $\frac{1}{3}$ cup milk; 2 tablespoons cream cheese = 1 tablespoon milk; and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup ice cream = $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk.

Bread-Cereal Group

Choose four or more servings daily from the bread-cereal group. This group includes all breads and cereals that are whole grain or enriched. If no cereals are chosen, have an extra serving of bread or baked goods.

Count as one serving: 1 slice bread; 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal; $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of cooked cereal, cornmeal, grits, macaroni, noodles, rice or spaghetti.

Some of the foods in this group include breads, cooked cereals, ready-to-eat cereals, cornmeal, crackers, flour, grits, macaroni and spaghetti, noodles, rice, rolled oats, quick breads and other baked goods if made from whole grain or enriched flour.

Foods in this group furnish worthwhile amounts of protein, iron, several of the B vitamins and food energy.

Other Foods

To round out meals and meet energy needs, almost everyone will use some foods not specified in the four food groups. Such foods include unenriched refined breads, cereals and flours; sugar; butter, margarine and other fats. These often are ingredients in recipes or are added to other food during preparation at the table.

Try to include some vegetable oil among the fats used.

Include Small Game in Meals Planned According to Basic Four Food Groups

Dishes that are quick and easy to prepare are popular for camp cooking during the hunt. A favorite is squirrel or rabbit fried in an iron skillet or a small game stew cooked in a Dutch oven while campers are on the hunt. If the hunters wish to take time to dress them out, the liver and heart should be cooked and served soon after the kill.

Roasts, steaks and ground and chopped meat are popular for preparing more exotic dishes at home. Fried rattlesnake makes an interesting treat to serve at an open house or party.

Suggested Menus with Small Game

The following menus suggest ways to use a variety of small game dishes in a day's meals planned to include the recommended servings of foods from the basic four food groups.

On the Hunt

	Meat Group	Milk Group	Vegetable- Fruit Group	Bread- Cereal Group	Other
Breakfast					
Fresh Grapefruit			X		
Fried Squirrel	X				
Hot Biscuits				X	
Cream Gravy		X			
Hot Chocolate		X			
Lunch					
Rabbit Mexicana	X				
Canned Corn			X		
Pickles and Relishes			X		
Bread				X	
Coffee/Milk		X			
Supper					
Stewed Armadillo	X				
Baked Potato			X		
Canned Green Beans			X		
Fresh Fruit			X		
Corn Bread				X	
Coffee/Milk		X			

At Home

Breakfast					
Orange Juice			X		
Fried Eggs	X				
Toast and Butter				X	X
Fruit Preserves					X
Coffee/Milk		X			
Lunch					
Rabbit Oriental	X				
Rice				X	
Spinach			X		
Fruit Cup			X		
Brownies				X	
Coffee/Milk		X			
Supper					
Roast Raccoon	X				
Dressing				X	
Mixed Vegetables			X		
Cranberry Juice			X		
Rolls				X	
Sugar Cookies				X	
Coffee/Milk		X			

Preparation and Recipes

The natural tenderness of small game is influenced by the age of the animal. It is helpful to the homemaker if the hunter tags the animal as to "young" or "mature." Young animals require less cooking than older and less tender ones and can be cooked by dry heat cooking methods.

Because game animals lead a vigorous life in foraging for food, muscle cuts of older animals are likely to be less tender, drier and less palatable than muscle cuts of domestic animals. Older game animals require more attention when cooking than domestic animals which are confined during fattening. Older and less tender animals will be more palatable when cooked with moisture.

Squirrel

Squirrel is one of the most tender of all wild game meats. The rosy pink to red flesh of young squirrel is tender and has a pleasing flavor. The flesh of older animals is darker red in color and may require marinating or long cooking for tenderness.

FRIED SQUIRREL

- | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1 | young squirrel, cut in pieces | $\frac{1}{2}$ | cup flour |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ | teaspoon salt | $\frac{1}{4}$ | cup shortening |
| $\frac{1}{8}$ | teaspoon pepper | | |

Mix salt and pepper with flour. Shake pieces of squirrel in flour mixture and brown in melted shortening in a heavy skillet. Lower the heat after browning and cover the skillet tightly. Cook over low heat for $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 hour or until well done. Remove cover during the last 10 minutes to crisp outer surfaces.

SQUIRREL FRICASSEE

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|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | young squirrel, cut in pieces | 3 | slices bacon |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ | teaspoon salt | 1 | tablespoon sliced onion |
| $\frac{1}{8}$ | teaspoon pepper | 2 | teaspoons lemon juice |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ | cup flour | $\frac{1}{3}$ | cup beef or chicken broth |

Rub pieces of squirrel with salt and pepper and roll in flour. Pan fry with chopped bacon for 30 minutes. Add onion, lemon juice and broth and cover tightly. Cook slowly for 2 hours. Just before serving, remove squirrel and make gravy by adding water or milk and flour to the pan drippings.

Variations: Add 1 tablespoon paprika, $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne, 1 sliced tart apple and 2 cups broth instead of bacon and lemon juice called for in this recipe.

BRUNSWICK STEW

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| 3 squirrels, cut in serving pieces | 1 cup chopped onion |
| 3 quarts water | 4 cups or 2 No. 303 cans tomatoes |
| ¼ cup diced bacon | 2 cups diced potatoes |
| ¼ teaspoon cayenne | 2 cups lima beans |
| 2 teaspoons salt | 2 cups corn |
| ¼ teaspoon black pepper | |

Place squirrel pieces in a large kettle . Add water. Bring slowly to boil; reduce heat and simmer 1½ to 2 hours, or until meat is tender, skimming surface occasionally. Remove meat from bones and return to liquid. Add bacon, cayenne, salt, pepper, onion, tomatoes, potatoes and lima beans. Cook 1 hour. Add corn and continue to cook 10 minutes. Serves six to eight.

Note: This recipe is particularly suitable for older, less tender animals.

BROILED SQUIRREL

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|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1 squirrel | ⅛ teaspoon pepper |
| 1 teaspoon salt | ½ teaspoon fat |
- Lemon wedges

Clean squirrel. Rub with salt and pepper. Brush with fat and place on a broiling rack. Broil 40 minutes, basting every 10 minutes with drippings. Squeeze lemon on squirrel before serving. Serves two to three.

Rabbit

Rabbit meat can be prepared the same as chicken. It is mild-flavored, fine-grained and practically all white meat.

Rabbit meat should always be cooked until well done. Rabbits usually weigh from 2 to 6 pounds, and young and tender ones can be cooked the same as young tender chickens. Most young rabbits require no soaking in strong salt water to tenderize them.

FRIED RABBIT

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|---|--------------------|
| 1½ to 2 pounds, ready-to-cook small young rabbit, cut in serving pieces | Flour |
| | Salt and pepper |
| | Cooking fat or oil |

Roll rabbit in mixture of flour, salt and pepper. Heat fat or oil about ¼-inch deep in a heavy dry pan large enough to hold the pieces without crowding. Use moderate temperature. Put in the large meaty pieces of rabbit first and cook about 10 minutes before adding the smaller pieces and giblets. Turn the pieces often for even cooking, and cook until well browned and tender, about 30 to 35 minutes. Serves three to four.

BARBECUED RABBIT

Brown together in 1 tablespoon of fat:

- ½ cup chopped onions
- ¼ cup green pepper
- ¼ cup celery

Remove from heat and stir in:

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| 1 | tablespoon sugar | 1 | tablespoon vinegar |
| 1 | teaspoon salt | ¼ | cup catsup |
| ¼ | teaspoon pepper | 2 | cups chopped rabbit meat |
| 1 | cup tomato soup or puree | | |

Simmer these ingredients at least 1 hour, adding water if necessary. Serve on toast or toasted buns. This recipe is excellent for older, tougher rabbit meat or leftover meat. It also freezes well. Makes approximately 1 quart.

FRICASSEED RABBIT

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|---|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 | rabbit, cut into serving pieces | ¼ | teaspoon pepper |
| 3 | slices of bacon | ½ | cup flour |
| ½ | teaspoon salt | 1 | cup milk, sour cream or broth |

Roll pieces of rabbit in flour seasoned with salt and pepper. Pan fry with chopped bacon for 30 minutes. Add a small amount of milk (or other liquid), just enough to keep rabbit from sticking, and cook covered until tender for 45 minutes to 1 hour at 300° F. Make gravy in pan by adding 1 tablespoon flour, mixed with ¼ cup water or milk.

Variation: Add two medium onions, sliced, after meat is browned.

RABBIT ORIENTAL

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|---|---------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1 | young rabbit, cut into serving strips | 2 | green peppers, chopped |
| 2 | tablespoons shortening | 1 | tablespoon chopped parsley |
| 1 | cup beef broth | 1 | small onion, sliced |
| ¼ | cup lemon juice | ⅛ | teaspoon ginger |
| ¾ | cup pineapple juice | ¼ | teaspoon garlic powder |
| 1 | cup pineapple chunks | ¼ | teaspoon sweet basil |
- Salt and pepper

Brown pieces of rabbit in hot fat. Add all other ingredients. Cover and cook slowly until tender, 45 minutes to 1 hour, at 300° F. Serve atop rice.

Option: Thicken liquid in pan with 2 teaspoons cornstarch dissolved in ¼ cup water and spoon over the rabbit for a glaze.

RABBIT MEXICANA

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| 1 rabbit, cut into serving pieces | ½ teaspoon cumin |
| Salt and pepper | 1 can tomato sauce |
| Sliver of garlic | 1 green pepper, chopped |
| 3 tablespoons olive oil | 1 onion |
| 1 tablespoon butter or margarine | 1 teaspoon chili powder |
| Pinch of sage | Jalapeno pepper to taste |
| | 1 teaspoon sugar |

Salt and pepper the rabbit and brown it in olive oil and butter or margarine. Add the other ingredients, a little water if necessary, and let simmer until the rabbit is tender.

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| 1 rabbit, cut into serving pieces | 1 bay leaf |
| Cider vinegar and water | 3 tablespoons fat |
| 1 sliced onion | ¼ teaspoon pepper |
| 1 cup burgundy-type wine | ½ teaspoon salt |
| 6 peppercorns | 1 cup sour cream |
| 3 whole cloves | |

Place pieces of rabbit in a crock or glass dish. Add wine, spices, onion and enough vinegar and water in equal parts to cover. Marinate rabbit for 2 days in the refrigerator. Remove the rabbit and dry the pieces well. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and roll lightly in flour. Brown in fat. Add marinade to make a depth of ¾ inch in pan. Cover tightly and simmer (190° to 200° F.) until done, adding more marinade if needed. Remove rabbit from pan, thicken drippings and add sour cream to gravy.

Opossum

Opossum is light in color, fine-grained and tender with generous fat deposits between the bands of muscle. Remove as much of the fat as possible before cooking to make the meat less greasy.

ROASTED STUFFED OPOSSUM WITH SWEET POTATOES

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|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 opossum | Dash pepper |
| ¼ cup fat | 1¼ teaspoons poultry seasoning |
| ½ cup chopped onion | ⅓ cup water |
| ½ cup chopped celery | 1 sweet potato per person |
| 6 cups bread cubes | |
| 1 teaspoon salt | |

Melt fat in skillet; add onion and celery and cook until tender. Combine bread cubes, salt, pepper and poultry seasonings with onions and celery. Add water and mix thoroughly. Fill the body cavity. Close by sewing the skin together with a heavy string or by skewering the skin together and lacing with a heavy string. Place,

underside down, on a rack in shallow roasting pan. Roast at 300° to 350° F. for 2 to 2½ hours, or until well done, basting occasionally with drippings and sprinkling lightly with flour after each basting for a crisp, crackly crust. When almost done, place boiled or baked sweet potatoes around meat and baste frequently with drippings. Remove browned opossum and potatoes to a heated large platter. Allow ¾ to 1 pound per portion.

BARBECUED OPOSSUM

Cut opossum in half; place on rack and roast at 300° F. for about 2 hours. Baste frequently with barbecue sauce. Follow the recipe for barbecue sauce given in the recipe for barbecued rabbit.

Raccoon

Raccoon meat is dark, coarse and long-fibered. Trim excess fat from the carcass. Soak only the strong and gamey carcasses in brine or a vinegar solution for 4 to 16 hours before cooking.

FRICASSEED RACCOON

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|---|--------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| 1 | raccoon, cut in serving pieces | ⅛ | teaspoon pepper |
| ¼ | cup flour | 3 | tablespoons fat |
| 1 | teaspoon salt | 2 | cups water |

Remove fat from lean meat. Combine flour, salt and pepper in a bag. Add meat and shake bag to coat. Fry in hot fat until brown. Add water, cover and simmer 2 hours or until tender.

ROAST RACCOON

- | | | | |
|--------|--|----|------------------|
| 3 to 4 | young raccoons, about 4 to 6 pounds each | 2 | cups flour |
| 5 | tablespoons salt | 1 | cup shortening |
| 2 | teaspoons pepper | 8 | medium onions |
| | | 12 | small bay leaves |

Skin, draw and clean the raccoon after killing. Remove, without breaking, the brown bean-shaped kernels from under forelegs and each thigh. Cut the carcass into pieces. Reserve meaty backs and legs for baking. Cook bony pieces in water to make a broth for gravy and dressing. Add small amount of seasonings. Simmer until meat is tender, strain and use only the broth. Sprinkle the back and leg pieces with salt and pepper and dredge with flour. Heat shortening in skillet. Add pieces of meat and brown on all sides. Transfer pieces to a roaster. Add the onions and bay leaves. Cover. Bake in moderate (350° F.) oven 2 hours or until meat is tender. Make a gravy by adding flour to drippings in pan. (Use 2 to 3 tablespoons for each cup of liquid or broth used.) Makes 24 servings.

DRESSING

3 loaves day-old bread	1 package (1½ ounces)
2½ teaspoons salt	dehydrated onion soup
1 teaspoon pepper	4 stalks celery, chopped
2½ teaspoons rubbed sage	½ cup butter or margarine
4 eggs, beaten	4 cups stock from raccoon

Cut slices of bread into cubes. Add salt, pepper and sage. Add eggs and toss lightly. Cook the onion soup, celery and butter in the four cups of stock. Moisten seasoned bread with stock. Bake in a large shallow pan in moderate (350° F.) oven 30 minutes. Makes 24 servings.

Other Small Game

Other relatively small wild game in Texas are armadillo and rattlesnake.

Armadillo, similar to pork, is light in color, fine-grained and tender with generous amounts of fat. Moist heat cooking methods are recommended for the less tender, older animal. Armadillo may be substituted in recipes for opossum.

STEWED ARMADILLO

Cut armadillo meat into cubes. Cook in a covered pan until light brown. Add flour and brown. Mix together black pepper, cumin seed and garlic and grind. Add chili powder and salt. Mix in a small amount of water and add to meat. Simmer for 5 to 10 minutes.

RATTLESNAKE MEAT

Rattlesnake may be cooked in a manner similar to rabbit or chicken. It should be soaked in brine overnight before cooking. It may be fried, baked or served as a stew or soup. It is tasty fried with bread crumbs.

Use only large healthy rattlesnakes (3 to 5 pounds live weight preferred). Decapitate with an ax about six inches behind head. Remove the skin and viscera and cut the remaining body section diagonally into 1-inch thick steaks. Soak 5 pounds of steaks in vinegar for 10 minutes; remove and sprinkle with hot sauce, salt and pepper; and roll in flour. Fry in deep fat. Serve immediately. Serves six.

References

After the Rabbit Kill, (B-2500), University of Wisconsin, Extension Service Publication.

After the Squirrel Kill, (B2501), University of Wisconsin, Extension Service Publication.

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